

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 01590 020946Z
ACTION CU-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 /018 W
-----002062 020948Z /23
O 020855Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7397
INFO USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OEXC, UR, SOPN
SUBJECT: "PLAINS, GEORGIA" EXHIBIT - PRESS GUIDANCE

REF: USIA 2945

1. PRESS TREATMENT OF ALLEGED REMOVAL OF PICTURES BY SOVIETS IS CLEAR CASE OF TEMPEST IN TEAPOT. WE ATTEMPTED TO CONVINCE LOCAL AMERICAN (AND REUTERS) CORRESPONDENTS THAT "PLAINS, GEORGIA" EXHIBIT IS EXTREMELY LOW-LEVEL UNDERTAKING WITH NO RPT NO POLITICAL OVERTONES THAT WE CAN DISCERN AT THIS REMOVE.

2. BACKGROUND IS THAT SUBJECT EXHIBIT, COMPRISING THIRTY BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOS DEPICTING PEOPLE AND LANDMARKS OF PLAINS, WAS SHOWN FROM MID-NOVEMBER UNTIL MID-DECEMBER IN TBILISI (SOVIET GEORGIA) HOUSE OF FRIENDSHIP. ADVANCE PARTY IN KIEV FELT SHOW, ALBEIT EXTREMELY MODEST, WOULD BE NICE DECORATION FOR KIEV HOUSE OF FRIENDSHIP TOO, AND ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE FOR SHOWING THERE. PRIOR TO KIEV OPENING (JANUARY 30), SOVIET SPONSORS APPARENTLY EXPRESSED SOME RESERVATIONS TO ADVANCE PARTY OVER A FEW SHOTS WHICH SOMEHOW OFFENDED THEIR PARTICULAR SENSITIVITIES (TBILISI SHOWING HAD BEEN TOTALLY UNEVENTFUL, WITH LOCALS APPARENTLY HAVING NO ADVERSE REACTION TO WHAT IS APOLITICAL AND INDEED INNOCUOUS SUBJECT MATTER). ADVANCE PARTY WAS TOLD BY PHONE TO BE REASONABLE ABOUT MINOR SOVIET SENSITIVITIES
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BUT TO WITHDRAW EXHIBIT IF SOVIETS INSTED ON MAJOR REVISIONS. REPRESENTATIVES OF ADVANCE PARTY THEN MET WITH SOVIETS AND AGREED TO WITHDRAW SEVERAL (FOUR OR FIVE) PHOTOS AND SHOW OPENED AS SCHEDULED.

3. MATTER GAINED PRESS ATTENTION WHEN LOCAL UPI STAFFER, SEEING BRIEF AND ENTIRELY POSITIVE ITEM ON TASS WIRE ABOUT

EXHIBIT OPENING, PHONED KIEV FOR LOCAL COLOR AND TALKED TO ADVANCE PARTY DEPENDENT, WHO, THINKING SHE WAS TALKING TO EMBOFF, DESCRIBED MINI-CONTROVERSY OVER INDIVIDUAL PICTURES. THIS WAS ON JANUARY 31, BUT EMBASSY LEARNED OF EPISODE ONLY ON FEBRUARY 1 WHEN OTHER LOCAL NEWSMEN REACTED TO SHORT UPI STORY AND BEGAN PHONING WITH FURTHER QUERIES (THIS INCLUDED REUTERS, AP, LA TIMES, CBS AND ABC). EMBASSY CONTACTED KIEV ADVANCE PARTY FOR BACKGROUND. KAP HEAD WAS ON OFFICIAL VISIT TO LVOV, BUT WE OBTAINED BARE DETAILS OF SITUATION AND HAVE SINCE BEEN TRYING TO PUT STORY INTO PERSPECTIVE.

4. DEPARTMENT AND AGENCY MAY FIND FOLLOWING GUIDANCE OF USE:

QUESTION: IS IT TRUE THAT SOVIET AUTHORITIES REJECTED SEVERAL PHOTOS WHICH WERE TO HAVE BEEN PART OF AN EXHIBIT ON THE PRESIDENT'S HOME TOWN?

ANSWER: "REJECTED" IS TOO STRONG A TERM. THE SOVIET SPONSORS OF THIS EXHIBIT IN KIEV APPARENTLY FELT THAT A FEW OF THE PICTURES SOMEHOW WERE NOT IN CONFORMITY WITH LOCAL CULTURAL TASTES AND ASKED THAT THEY NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBIT. IN CONSULTATION WITH OUR PEOPLE, IT WAS AGREED THAT IT MIGHT BE BEST IF SOME OF THE PHOTOS WERE NOT SHOWN, BUT THIS WAS SIMPLY A JUDGMENT CALL, KEEPING IN MIND THAT WE NEVER WANT IN ANY WAY TO OFFEND THE SENSIBILITIES OF OUR AUDIENCES. MOST OF US WOULD CERTAINLY NEVER HAVE FOUND ANYTHING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OBJECTIONABLE ABOUT ANY OF THESE PICTURES, AND INDEED THE ENTIRE EXHIBIT IN QUESTION HAD JUST BEEN SHOWN TO THE PUBLIC FOR A MONTH IN TBILISI, CAPITAL OF THE SOVIET REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA. LET ME STRESS IN THE STRONGEST TERMS THAT THIS IS ENTIRELY A MATTER OF TASTE - THIS EXHIBIT IS SIMPLY A VIEW OF SMALL-TOWN AMERICAN LIFE AND IT HAS NO POLITICAL CONTENT WHATSOEVER. SIMILARLY, WE ARE READING NO POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS, OR ANY OTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR THAT MATTER, INTO THIS EPISODE. IT IS STRICTLY SMALL POTATOES.

5. NO FURTHER CALLS RECEIVED FROM PRESS ON MORNING OF FEBRUARY 2, AND WE FEEL MATTER MAY HAVE RUN ITS COURSE AT THIS END.
MATLOCK

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INSTRUCTIONS, EXHIBITS, THE PRESS, CULTURAL EXHIBITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOSCOW01590
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780049-1041
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197802101/aaaadhml.tel
Line Count: 108
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f0cdcdcc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION CU
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3430713
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: \"PLAINS, GEORGIA\" EXHIBIT - PRESS GUIDANCE
TAGS: OEXC, SOPN, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f0cdcdcc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014